

Contributed

THE JOHN G. HALL MEMORIAL CHURCH, CARDENAS, CUBA.

Cuba's heritage from Spanish rule is the block-houses which dot the landscape, the great fortresses, such as Morro and Cabanas at Habana, and the Roman Catholic church. Small wonder that we hear of wars and rumors of war until the people had thrown off the galling yoke.

After the smoke of the struggle precipitated by that affair of the Maine had cleared away, there appeared in Cardenas a man who claimed to come on a mission of peace and with love for the Cubans in his heart. He opened a Sabbath school and held religious services at stated periods. Immediately he was opposed and maligned by the Romanists. His motives were impugned and insinuations of a grave character were given currency by his enemies. But in the spirit of the Master "he opened not his mouth." Along the coast we see, at times, some great rock that juts out into the sea. The storm hurls the waves against its face and lashes them into fury, but when the storm abates and the waters are quieted, there is no sign of the tempest save an added luster on the face of the rock. So it was with this man of God. His life and his services were a sufficient refutation of the false charges of his enemies. Little by little, with the message of salvation upon his lips, he lived and loved his way into the hearts of the people, and when he died, many who had censured now mourned his loss.

That man was the sainted Jno. G. Hall, who, at the request of the Foreign Missions Committee, established the work of the Southern Presbyterian Church in Cuba.

The seed sown by him and his worthy coadjutors, and nourished by their faithful successors, have taken root and are now bursting into the flower and fruitage. A most significant evidence of this fact is found in the circumstances leading up to and accompanying the dedication, on the night of April 2, of the new Presbyterian church here in Cardenas, fittingly called "The Jno. G. Hall Memorial Church."

It is not the purpose of this letter to detail the progress of the work from its beginning, though it would be interesting history. Suffice it to say that from the start the congregation began to plan and pray for a church building, and about four years ago, a goodly number of believers having been gathered in, under the leadership of Rev. R. L. Wharton the plans and prayers began to take shape. A lot, well located near the heart of the city, was bought and paid for. Steadily though slowly, the work of accumulating funds for a building went on. Matters were brought to a crisis last summer by the ejection of the congregation from the chapel which had been in use for several years, it having fallen into the hands of a Catholic priest. It seemed a providential indication that the time had come to build. Aided by friends and churches in the States, notably the First church of Durham, N. C., enough money was secured to begin. A few days

before Christmas, the first dirt was broken; on the first day of February the corner-stone was laid. There has been fine weather and practically no backsets, the building having been finished within a few days of contract time.

The self-sacrificing giving on the part of the congregation is a notable feature of the struggle to obtain a church home. We are made to marvel, in some instances, at the liberality. It is not simply a building given by the Americans, but, in the truest sense, an expression of self-sacrificing love by the members themselves to their God.

The time set for the inauguration of the temple was Friday, April 2, at 7:30 p. m. Every thing was in readiness. Most heartily did the congregation sing the opening song, "The Morning Light is Breaking." Rev. H. B. Someillan, of Guanabacoa, a minister of the Northern Presbyterian Church, preached the sermon. It was a powerful Gospel message from Gal. 6: 14, "But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." In the course of his remarks he paid a fine tribute to the memory of the founder of the mission whose name the church bears.

Rev. R. L. Wharton, now in charge of the work in Cardenas, made a short statement, formally dedicating the Jno. G. Hall Memorial church to the worship of Almighty God. The dedicatory prayer was offered by Rev. J. T. Hall, of Remedios. When the pastor requested the congregation to stand and sing "Praise God from whom all blessings flow" there was a response that was unmistakable in its sincerity. Following the benediction there were greetings, and felicitations, and congratulations so abundant and so hearty that our hearts were made to rejoice the more.

Of our own mission, there were present with us Rev. J. T. Hall, of Remedios; Rev. H. F. Beaty, of Placetas; Miss Edith Houston, of Caibarien, and Mrs. J. G. Hall, the widow of Rev. J. G. Hall, for whom the church is named. It was a great joy to the congregation to have Mrs. Hall present, and certainly her own heart must have been made to rejoice to see the fruits of her own and her husband's labors.

But what about the congregation? There were four hundred and thirty chairs in the building; these were all occupied, and a number had to stand. Outside at the windows the crowds gathered, some remaining throughout the entire service, others going away because unable to get in the building. A most remarkable congregation it was, and the order and attention were equally remarkable. There were numbers present who had never attended a Protestant service before.

There is one significant conclusion to be drawn from the facts above stated, and it is this: Slowly, but surely, the prejudice against Protestantism is giving way in Cardenas, and Protestantism is being recognized as a beneficent force. May we buttress this conclusion with a few individual instances?

Several years ago a woman joined our church here. Her two daughters interposed such bitter opposition that the mother refrained from church attendance. Those two daughters were present at the dedication.

A man holding a public position of prominence, and who probably had never attended a Protestant service